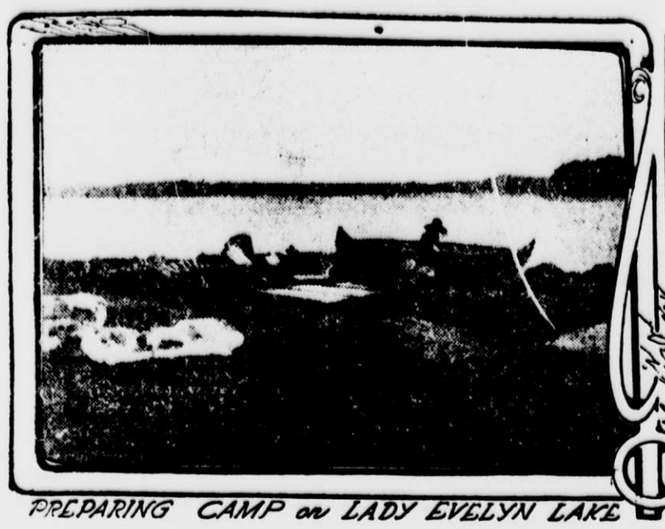
FISHING AND CANOEING THROUGH CANADIAN WILDS



PREPARING CAMP on LADY EVELYN LAKE

By Rushing Rivers, Limpid Lakes and Amid Verdured Silences for a Long Vacation—Indian Guides Lead to Favorite Spot Where Black Bass Are in Thousands and Will Take the Fly

CAMP on TEMAGAMI

IF YOU ARE a fisherman and delight to battle with the gamy bass, to cast for the wily trout or pit your strength against the plunging rush of the maskinonge; if you delight in the deep woods, the silent lakes and the rushing rivers; if hard days in a canoe and bright cool nights, with only a fragile tent to shelter you, bring to you the joy of living—in other words, if you are a perfectly normal, red blooded man this is the season of the year when your thoughts are sure to turn toward the silent places.

Come with me and we will wander for a fortnight far away from electric lights and telephones and subways, away up in the north of Canada, where until within the last few years no white man but the hardy trapper or the adventurous huntsman had penetrated. Come to pass your days in idle drowsing across the surface of some splendid lake, to fight your way with push pole and tump line against some brawling rapid, or if you happen to be going the other way to dash through the foam crested waves and graze big rocks so closely that your breath will die in your throat while your canoe goes at a forty mile an hour speed.

Don't bother to take an outfit with you. Of course you will want your fishing tackle for in few other places on this civilized hemisphere of ours is it given to mortal man to find better fishing than in just the country we are planning to invade. Take plenty of clothes, old clothes and rough ones that can be ruined without a tremor. Take a sweater, for the nights and early mornings are cold. Take a rain coat, for the elements do not always smile, and above all, take some good heavy shoes, preferably with rubber soles, for the land is rocky and the rocks are often as slippery as ice.

As to the fishing tackle—and you are supposed to be a fisherman if you read this—it may be well to particularize. You will want a good stout rod of about six ounces, preferably of seasoned split bamboo; a good oiled silk line; a couple of hundred yards of it for trolling and another line of equal length, but of thin black linen for fly casting; half a dozen small trolling spoons and last and most important two or three dozen small flies. Of course you must have a landing net, for it is next to impossible to land a game fish from a canoe without this artificial aid.

Be very careful in choosing your flies, and the smaller the hook the better chance you will have to catch fish. Don't allow your prejudices to guide your selection, but get Parmachene belles and black gnats, silver doctors and coachmen, brown and ginger hackles and any others you may fancy, and be sure to test each barb, so that when your fish strikes you may be sure of snagging him properly. Two or three good lengths of stout gut leader will complete your outfit.

Now we will head for Buffalo or Montreal, as your preference may be, and if to the former we will get a Grand Trunk train to North Bay and a Canadian Pacific train to Mattawa. If the latter we will get a Canadian Pacific train in Montreal and get out of Mattawa. In Mattawa, which lies on the Ottawa River—la belle rivière of the French Canadians—with the province of Quebec just across the water, the first man to see is the district manager of the Hudson's Bay Company, for it is to this company that one must look for a first class outfit for the woods.

Mattawa is the residence of the Hudson's Bay Company official, whose territory reaches as far north as Hudson Bay, six weeks journey by canoe through the wilderness and several hundred miles east and west. There are no posts further south. The district manager is usually an Englishman, and if he is half as affable and painstaking as they usually are he will arrange a first class outfit for you and get you Indian guides, an Indian to each white man in the party.

Dozens of Splendid Canoes.

While we are arranging our outfit let us devote a little attention to our canoes, which after all, as being our means of transportation, are perhaps the most important part of the equipment. In a big shed back of the Hudson's Bay Company store you will find dozens of splendid big birch canoes, most of them about seventeen feet long and with a beam of from thirty-six to forty inches. They are close ribbed inside with spruce splinters, have good broad gunwales and three or four stout cedar thwarts. Each will carry 500 pounds without drawing more than two or three inches of water and they are the most seaworthy of all the genus canoe.

The average canoe of the Peterboro or Old Town type does not find much favor for long trips through the woods. Of course it may be a little lighter than the birch, but once it is rammed against a rock it is done for, and it is not nearly so seaworthy. Cedar, basswood and canvas canoes are never seen in the Northland except in the hands of tenderfeet. The old woodsman or the native Indian invariably takes to the birch bark craft.

No competent guide is worried in the least if he happens to jam his canoe on a rock or snag. He will paddle ashore, kindle a small fire and with an old skillet melt some resin, and in a few minutes the canoe will be as good as new. This is the supreme advantage of a birch canoe in a country where the traveller is apt to be wrecked against the rocks of a rapid or to slip and fall on a rough portage (pronounce it just as you do the "age" in garage) or do any one of a dozen other things that would spell disaster with a cedar or canvas canoe.

Now that we have selected our canoes, one for each two men, let us see about the rest of the outfit. If there are to be four of us we must have two small A tents, one for us and one for the Indians. We must have a couple of skillets, half a dozen or eight tin plates, a couple of boiling kettles, a teapot, four big tin cups and some iron knives, forks and spoons. That is about the limit of the cooking utensils.

The provisions require more thought. Of course we want pepper and salt and sugar and tea and rice. Yes, but I don't like tea, and rice is good for Chinamen, you exclaim. But you will find coffee the most stale and unprofitable thing in the woods that you can imagine, and a big steaming tin cup of tea after a hard day in the rapids acts as a restorer and makes you ready for an evening with your fly rod.

We will want at least fifty pounds of flour and the same amount of potatoes, a good big piece of bacon and maybe a smoked ham, plenty of hardtack and some bread and a few jars of jam and pickles. You have no idea how good sweet things and sour taste away off in the woods. We will take about twenty pounds of butter and maybe a few cans of baked beans, which by the way are a real luxury when one is away from civilization. With that list of provisions and the fish and game it is possible to take along the way four people can live mighty comfortably for a couple of weeks.

If we are lucky we will find that our head guide is Hyacinthe Seymour, and maybe Simon White Duck will be second man. If so we can be assured of two of the most expert canoemen in that part of Canada. Hyacinthe is a full bred Algonquin Indian, huge in bulk with great shoulders, a skin the color of old leather and little black eyes as keen as a weasel's. And what he doesn't know about a woodland fishing trip wouldn't fill any space at all in the average book.

For Hyacinthe knows it all. He isn't an especially pleasant companion; for like all Indians he is taciturn and seldom speaks unless he is spoken to. But Hyacinthe knows every bytrail and portage (don't forget how to pronounce it); can tell at a glance whether a rapid is navigable and knows more about the habits of the wild creatures of the forest than they know themselves.

Never Mind the Bed Clothes.

But there is one thing we have forgotten. We have no bed clothing. If you care to do so you may take a sleeping bag from home, but for my part the great blankets available in the Hudson's Bay Company's stores are the best. We have nothing like them in this country. They are double, each about nine feet long, and the pair weigh about twenty pounds. Don't bother about a pillow. Use your old coat or a sweater and hurry up, for here's the wagon to take our traps to the Canadian Pacific station, and if we miss this train we will have to wait three days for another, for they run twice a week only.

The train bumps and jolts across a long bridge over the Ottawa River and in a few minutes we are in the province of Quebec. Then twenty-five or thirty-five miles north we come to Temiskaming station, at the foot of the lake of the same name. The lake is ninety miles long and ranges in width from a third of a mile to three miles. It is really the Ottawa River, but the river to the natives does not begin until the rapid at the foot of Temiskaming. But at Temiskaming we will find a small steamboat waiting and on it we will go thirty-five miles north to the mouth of the Montreal River. We will be landed with our traps in a huge batteau rowed to shore by the crew of the steamer, while our Indians deftly slide the canoes into the water and paddle silently to the gravel beach in front of old Isaac Bonnait's farm.

Isaac is a hospitable French Canadian whose English is deplorable but whose heart is in the right place. He will make you welcome to his land (whisper it, he is probably a squatter) and sell you any supplies you may need, and at a very fair price. While you are getting acquainted with Isaac and his dogs—every man in the Northland has a score or more of them—the Indians will be pitching camp and getting supper. You leave dinner behind in Manhattan. After a savory meal you will find the evening chilly and will be glad to put on the sweater in your kit bag and sit close to the camp fire while you smoke your pipe.

That first night in the woods you will be impressed by the vast stillness of the silent places. Even Isaac Bonnait's dogs do not howl, and you are not quite far enough back from civilization to hear the myriad night noises of the forest. The biting breeze will sough through the tall pines on the hills on either side of the lake, and if it happens to be moonlight you will see the sheen of the water for several miles each way, for Temiskaming runs almost in a straight line.

When bed time comes you will find a fragrant pile of spruce tips in your tent and it will take you only a few minutes to spread your blankets over them, slip off your clothes and "crawl in." And in another few minutes, unless there is something radically wrong with you, you will be sleeping like a baby. And what is more you will keep on sleeping until the guttural voices of the Indians rouse you in the morning. No matter what time you get up they are up ahead of you and have a fire going and everything ready for breakfast. Now if you hurry there is just time to dash down to the lake and take a plunge, rub down and get dressed for breakfsat. Don't try the plunge if you have a weak heart or if cold water doesn't agree with you, for the water is cold up there and the air in the early morning is even colder.

We have come all this distance without my telling you where we are going, but now it is only fair that you should know. We will start up the Montreal River, branch off into the Metabetchawan, up through the Bass lakes, Snake Lake, White Bear Lake and into Temagami, which you must know is the paradise of the Algonquin Indians. It will take us a couple of days to cross Temagami into Lady Evelyn Lake and so on to Mattawabika Falls and the Montreal River again. But we are still far above Temiskaming and must go down the Montreal for a couple of days before we come out again at Bonnait's farm and wait for the steamboat to take us home, back to civilization.

It is only a mile or two up the Montreal before we branch into the Metabetchawan, and it is not all easy going, for it is upstream and the current is swift. Though you will be riding at your ease in the bow of the canoe, with the dunnage amidships and the Indian paddling in the rear, don't be afraid to take a paddle and do your spell of work every day. It will give you an appetite, make you sleep better and harden up those muscles that have grown flabby after a year in the city.

The Metabetchawan is a beautiful little river—creek we would call it down here. It twists and turns through a virgin woodland, with here and there a runway down its steep banks on which may be seen the tracks of a score of different kinds of wild animals from the bear and moose down to the tiny and elusive weasel. Around almost every bend in the stream you will be startled by the swift whirr of wings and a pair of big black ducks or redheads will get up out of the water and disappear like lightning.

Maybe you will come across a brood of young ones, and then if you are spry you can have young wild duck for your supper that night. Don't try to shoot. Indeed you will have no occasion for a gun, which is the reason I did not include it in your outfit. The Indian will swing the canoe in shore almost as fast as the young ducks can scuttle across the water and it is up to you to hit a couple of them with your paddle. If you don't you will miss a dainty tidbit, for there are few things more delicious than a young wild duck roasted before an open fire as the Indians roast it.

A ROUGH BIT OF THE METABETCHAWAN

THREE BEAUTIES from LADY EVELYN LAKE

END OF A RAPID BELOW RABBIT LAKE

WITH PUSH POLE and TUMP LINE on the METABETCHAWAN

Before noon, after a stiff task of poling the canoe up a swift run in the water you will come to a cliff, almost perpendicular and seemingly about 100 feet high. Land at the foot of it, pick up a pack of the dunnage and start to climb the steep trail that you can trace dimly up the side of the hill. Here is where you will need your rubber soles; and be sure to plant your feet firmly at every step and hang on with both hands. If you don't——

At the top of the cliff the trail leads off through the woods, dim and indistinct here and there, but clear enough to be followed without difficulty. Just keep going for half a mile and you will come to a beautiful little lake. It is known as First Bass and is the first of a chain of lakes and rivers that lead into the Algonquin Paradise. After a time your Indians with their heavy dunnage, bags and canoes will appear. It may occur to you to wonder how the Indians with those unwieldy canoes ever got up that hill, but don't ask them, for they won't tell. That is only the first of the things that will surprise you.

You journey on through lake and river, occasionally stopping to make a portage, having your lunch daily and camping toward sunset each night for five days and nights. There are no houses or farms or settlements along the route. You are alone with your party and move day after day without seeing a soul unless you happen to meet the canoe of some fisherman who is coming out the way you are going in. These fellows often rent a big war canoe at the Indian village on Bear Island in Temagami, and will make the run from the island, which is approximately in the middle of Temagami, down to Bonnait's farm between daylight and dark. This same distance it will take you five or six days to make, but you must remember that you are going up stream with one experienced paddler, while the outward bound man in the war canoe is travelling light with not less than six, and probably eight, skilled paddlers to drive the canoe through the water until it rivals the speed of a motor boat.

You can unlimber your fishing tackle anywhere along the way and be sure of good sport. If you are tired paddling get out your rod and line, put on a light trolling spoon and sit still. But you won't sit still long, for shortly you will have a strike and then you will experience all the tremors of delight of the true fisherman until your skill has triumphed over your finny adversary and your pocket scales tell you just how big he is.

If you prefer fly fishing wait until evening well after sundown and then go out in the long twilight with a couple of bright flies on your leader, say a Parmachene Belle and a Silver Doctor, and whip the water along the shore. Then you will have some sport worthy of the name, for the bass in these cold Northern waters rise to the fly just like a trout. They are the regular small mouthed black bass and the most that you will catch range in weight from a pound and a half up to three pounds. Occasionally you will take a four pounder and more occasionally a five pounder, but be sure that every one you get, big or little, will test your fisherman's skill to the uttermost.

Often in the evening while you are gliding along shore in your canoe the Indian's paddle slipping noiselessly through the water and your fly dropping like thistle down you will hear a sudden splash and the dark head of a mink will cut the water as he swims away with the speed of a torpedo.

The fifth day after you leave Bonnait's farm you should be in White Bear Lake with only a height of land dividing you from Temagami. But miles below White Bear Bake as you are toiling up a little stream between two of the small lakes you will be confronted with a rude board sign high up on a giant pine tree which will inform you that you are on the borders of the Temagami forest reserve. The reserve comprises the entire ancient Algonquin paradise, so-called because the Indians thought it was the most beautiful place in the world and could imagine no place more fitted to be the happy hunting ground of the tribe.

Once over the height of land between White Bear Lake and Temagami and you will be fairly in one of the most beautiful places scenically there is in the whole Northland. The water in Temagami is clear as crystal and you can ride along in your canoe and look over the side to see the great pike and lake trout lying like logs in twenty feet of water while schools of bass swim lazily about. The shores are unbroken forests, without a stick of timber cut, and there is none of the ugly shore line caused by the lumber dams in the lakes further south.

Fish Until Tired.

The fishing in Temagami is almost beyond words. You can catch great beautiful black bass until you are tired and ashamed of yourself, or if you prefer other prey go out after supper some night with a heavy trolling line and go after lake trout and pike. There are big ones of both kinds in Temagami and every half hour will land one or more of such a size that you will want to come home and tell stories that no one will believe, although strictly true.

About noon of the second day after you strike Temagami you will come to Bear Island. There is a Hudson's Bay Company store on the island where you can replenish your depleted supplies and there is an Indian village that boasts several score families. A glance at the village is worth while and the factor in the store will greet you cordially and give you any supplies you may need with a bill on the division headquarters at Mattawa that you can pay when you are settling for your outfit.

Late that evening you can get out of Temagami into White Fish Lake—so called probably because there never was a whitefish caught in it, though there is a popular fallacy that whitefish abound in many of the Canadian lakes. And they may, but it has never been my fortune in twenty years of summering in Canada to see one. It is only a short distance over the Sharp Rock portage—which is well named—until you are in Diamond Lake, and a few miles across it and another portage and you are in Lady Evelyn. Beautiful as is Temagami, Lady Evelyn surpasses it, for while Temagami is big and studded with big islands, Lady Evelyn is like a jewel, small, dainty and with little green islands shining in the bright sunlight. Lady Evelyn is the only place in that region where the fishing is better than in Temagami, but there is no use telling you about it for you wouldn't believe it.

That you are still in the Temagami Reserve will be proved to you by a fire ranger's cabin on the lake. There are twenty of these rangers scattered through the reserve living in pairs and patrolling the district daily. They are to prevent forest fires and to see that the game and fish laws are obeyed. If you have a gun they are apt to confiscate it and if you let your desires get away with your head and catch more than your allotment of fish for a day don't do it when the rangers are around.

For while they are reasonable fellows eager to meet a white man from civilization they have their duty to perform. If it happens to be meal time when they meet you they will stop and eat some of your food and tell you about the big bull moose they saw just up around the corner and of the bear that raided their provisions a few nights ago. They don't care much about fish or bacon; they get too much of it, but if you have a jar of jam open it will disappear with astonishing rapidity.

Once out of Lady Evelyn Lake you pass into Long Lake and so on to the beautiful Mattawabika Falls, where the Lady Evelyn water tumbles down fifty feet into the Montreal River. You must pass down the Montreal, turgid and sluggish here, running through swamp land strange in that part of the country, down through Bay Lake, a widening of the river, and you reach the Pork Rapids.

If the water is right and you are courageous your Indians will shoot the rapids with you in the canoe and you will get a thrill the like of which cannot be bought for any money. Then on down this winding river, here so dull and ordinary looking you tire of it, only to be roused the next minute by the roar of a rapid that if you tried to go through it would smash your canoe into a thousand pieces and probably crush you against some of the jagged rocks that poke their worn heads through the rushing surges.

There is good fishing still in the Montreal but the real novelty of the trip so far as fish are concerned is to be met with just under Mattawabika Falls. Resort to your plebeian bait fishing and in a few minutes you will get the nicest lot of rock bass weighing up to a pound you ever saw. And they are a good change from the black bass.

Journey of Unalloyed Delight.

The banks of the Montreal below Bay Lake soon take on an appearance of civilization, for you are only a few miles away from the great Cobalt silver district. But in a short time all this yields again to the natural woods and your journey back to Temiskaming will be one of unalloyed delight, especially if the water is right to permit your shooting most of the rapids. Some of the portages here are very rough and any one without a natural adaptability as a woodsman is very apt to get lost. There are no trails and it is simply a question of making your way through woodland so rough it seems impossible to penetrate and scrambling along the rocks at the river's edge with the boiling waters leaping up and clutching at your feet constantly.

It will seem good to get back to civilization again and when you are seated in the dining car southward bound toward home, you will delight in the food you get. But wait until the next day and see if the longing for the pungent odor of wood smoke and the crisp fried fish doesn't steal over you.